

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY LISBON

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

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AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMCONSUL OPORTO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL PONTA DELGADA

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

USMISSION NATO

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

USNMR SHAPE BRUSSELS BEL

C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 5078

EXDIS

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DEPT PLS PASS INFO: DIA WASHDC, CINCUSAFE, CSAF WASHDC

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TAGS: MILI, GW, PO

SUBJ: PORTUGUESE G-91'S GROUNDED

REF: LISBON 1934 DTG 251713Z 76

SUMMARY: VICE CHIEF OF STAFF FOR MATERIEL, PORTUGUESE AIR FORCE.

TOLD DATT THAT UNFLYABLE CONDITION OF FOURTEEN G-91'S RECENTLY

PRESENTED AS GIFT FROM FRG TO PORTUGAL, WITH MUCH PUBLICITY AND

FANFARE, WILL SOON BE

RETURNED TO GERMANY WITH A RESULTANT SCANDAL UNLESS FRG

TAKES QUICK ACTION TO PROVIDE AIRWORTHY AIRCRAFT.

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1. BRIGADEIRO LEMOS FERREIRA, VICE CHIEF OF STAFF FOR MATERIEL, PORTUGUESE AIR FORCE, CALLED DATT ON 27 JULY TO ASK HIM TO COME TO HIS OFFICE TO DISCUSS A PROBLEM. UPON ARRIVAL, LEMOS, WHO IS NORMALLY A COOL CUSTOMER, EXHIBITED A GOOD DEAL OF STRAIN AND ANGER AS HE EXPLAINED THAT ALL OF THE FOURTEEN G-91 AIRCRAFT PRESENTED TO PORTUGAL AT WELL PUBLICIZED CEREMONIES AT BEJA ON 15 JULY 1976 ARE GROUNDED AT MONTIJO. EIGHT OF THEM ARE ALREADY OVERDUE FOR IRAN (INSPECT AND REPAIR AS NECESSARY) AND THE OTHER SIX WILL REACH IRAN DATES BEFORE END OF THE YEAR.

2. LEMOS SAID THAT HE WOULD DELIVER A STRONGLY WORDED LETTER TO THE CHIEF OF THE GERMAN MILITARY COMMISSION IN PORTUGAL AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. THE THRUST OF HIS LETTER WILL BE TO POINT OUT THAT VERY SOON THE PORTUGUESE AIR FORCE HIERARCHY, THE GOVERNMENT OF GERMANY AND BY ASSOCIATION, NATO, WILL BE ATTACKED IN THE PRESS UNLESS FRG IS FORTHCOMING WITH AN IMMEDIATE SOLUTION.

3. LEMOS SAID THAT BOTH THE CHIEF OF THE GERMAN MILITARY COMMISSION AND THE ARMED FORCES ATTACHE ARE OUT OF THE COUNTRY AND SINCE HIS OWN CHIEF OF STAFF IS OUT OF THE COUNTRY ON THE TIMOR MISSION, HE COULD NOT APPROACH THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR. BECAUSE THE HEAT IS ON FOR A SOLUTION TO SALVAGE AN ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION, HE TURNED TO THE AMERICANS. HE SAID, "WHEN THIS SCANDAL BLOWS IT IS GOING TO HAVE ITS IMPACT, NOT ONLY ON GERMANY BUT ON NATO AND BY ASSOCIATION THE U.S." LEMOS WANTS TO AVOID THIS AT ALL COSTS.

4. LEMOS OUT LINED THE "FACTS" AS FOLLOWS:

A. THE AIRCRAFT ARE GROUNDED AT MONTIJO. ALL THE MILITARY KNOW WHY AND THE ANTI-NATO ACTIVISTS AS WELL AS THE ANTI-AIR FORCE PRESS IS SNOOPING. IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THE LEFTIST PRESS HAS THE WHOLE STORY. THE POLITICAL ACTIVISTS WHO HAVE BEEN SEEKING A WAY TO BREAK UP THE SOLIDARITY OF THE AIR FORCE NOW HAVE A CAUSE CELEBRE HANDED TO THEM ON A PLATTER. NOT ONLY WILL GERMANY, THE U.S., AND NATO COME UNDER ATTACK, BUT ALSO THE HIERARCHY OF GENERALS MORAIS DA SILVA, CARDOSO, LEMOS FERREIRA AND THE BASE COMMANDER AT MONTIJO, LT COL VASQUEZ (WHO HAS DONE HIS BEST TO CONCEAL THE CONDITION OF THE AIRCRAFT). THEY WILL BE SUBJECT TO RIDICULE AS BEING TAKEN IN LIKE "STUPID HAYSEEDS". WHAT MAKES IT EVEN WORSE, SAYS LEMOS, IS THAT THE PORTU-
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GUESE AIR FORCE WAS INCLINED TO AVOID PUBLICITY IN THE ORIGINAL TRANSACTION BUT THE GERMANS INSISTED ON ALL THE FANFARE WHICH WILL MAGNIFY THE PROBLEM IN THE PUBLIC EYE. THE PAF WILL APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF. THE ANTI-NATO ELEMENTS, BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE ARMED FORCES, WILL EXPLOIT THE SITUATION AND SAY THAT INSTEAD OF THE G-91'S BEING A TRANSITIONAL CAPABILITY TOWARD A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR THE AIR FORCE THE PAF IS REALLY JUST A DUMPING GROUND FOR WORTHLESS GARBAGE.

5. LEMOS SAID, "IF WE CANNOT HAVE A SWIFT RESOLUTION OF THIS PROBLEM WHICH ENABLES US TO PUT THE G-91'S INTO THE AIR, THE PORTUGUESE AIR FORCE WILL IN ALL LIKELIHOOD, TO SAVE FACE, PUBLICLY REQUEST THAT GERMANY RETURN THE G-91'S TO THEIR WON COUNTRY. I DON'T EVEN WANT TO CONTEMPLATE HOW THE ATTENDANT SCANDAL WILL STRAIN RELATIONS WITH GERMANY AND NATO AND RIP OUR AIR FORCE WIDE OPEN."

COMMENT: AT THE AMBASSADOR'S DIRECTION DATT BRIEFED GERMAN AMBASSADOR ON THE CONVERSTATION WITH LEMOS FERREIRA. AMBASSADOR GASPARI SAID HE APPRECIATED THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM AND THAT HE WOULD IMMEDIATELY ADVISE BONN OF THE SITUATION. FOR AMEMBASSY BONN: GIVEN THE FRG SENSITIVITIES ON MILITARY ASSISTANCE MATTERS REPORTED IN YOUR RECENT MESSAGE SUGGEST YOU MAY NOT WISH TO BECOME INVOLVED IN RESOLUTION OF THIS PROBLEM. HOWEVER, YOU SHOULD BE AWARE THAT FROM THE PORTUGUESE AIR FORCE POINT OF VIEW, A ONE-FOR-ONE IMMEDIATE EXCHANGE OF AIRCRAFT FOR THOSE IN FLYABLE CONDITION IS THE MOST DESIRABLE SOLUTION. THIS COULD BE PASSED ON TO FRG IF YOU DEEM IT USEFUL.
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